

OBSERVATIONS OF PREDATOR/PREY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PRAYING MANTIDS AND GECKOS

By Peter Wright*

There have been a number of reports of predation by praying mantids on vertebrates such as frogs, lizards and birds. Dr. Mike Ridpath of CSIRO Wildlife Research, Darwin, refers to these as well as describing his own observations of encounters between the large green mantid (*Hierdula wernerii*) and green tree frogs (*Litoria caerulea*) (Ridpath, 1977). He also reports two cases of the same species of mantid attacking brown honeyeaters (*Lichmera indistincta*).

My own observation of vertebrate predation by a mantid occurred on 4 April 1978, in the Narrows area of Darwin, when loud, agitated calls drew my attention to a struggle between a house gecko (*Hemidactylus frenatus*) and a large green mantid (presumed to be *H. wernerii*). This introduced gecko (Cogger, 1975) is a common resident of Darwin homes and is often found around external lights or on fly wire screens to which moths and other insects are



attracted.

In this case the gecko became the prey. Its body was firmly held by one of the mantid's spined forelegs, while the mantid slowly ate through the discarded tail held by the other foreleg. After approximately 20 minutes the tail, bones and all, had been eaten and the mantid, now using both forelegs, began on the right leg of the ensnared gecko. The gecko remained alive for some time until the mantid had eaten well into its body.

After approximately 90 minutes the mantid was observed to have discarded the remains of the body, comprising only head and spinal column, and this was found the following morning in the final process of being stripped by ants.

Two nights later another large green mantid (possibly the same individual) was observed under the same light, this time with a captured brown moth.

Since then I have witnessed several interactions between mantids and geckos, although none quite so grisly as the first. In one case another large green mantid was apparently unsuccessful in stalking geckos on a fly wire screen. On 6 May 1981 a small green mantid was observed on the outside wall of my home in Millner close to a number of geckos. Although much larger than the mantid the geckos, after an initial

investigation of the insect, appeared disturbed (waving tail) and hurriedly retreated. The mantid was observed for 10 minutes during which time it moved within striking distance of geckos several times without being attacked, causing the geckos to withdraw instead.

It is hard not to have a grudging admiration for these deadly, voracious insects which can successfully take on the formidable insectivorous gecko.

REFERENCES

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